

# *The Eternaut: A Netflix miniseries inspired by the fight against Argentina's dictatorships*

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15 June 2025

*The Eternaut* is a 2025 Netflix miniseries based on a classic Argentine science fiction comic published in the late 1950s that powerfully reflected the political and social struggles of that era.

With the passage of time, it became one of the most important works of Argentine and Latin American comics, created by the writer Héctor Germán Oesterheld and the cartoonist Francisco Solano López.

The relationship between *The Eternaut* and politics is profound, both because of the content of the work and because of its author's biography. Oesterheld went from being an adventure writer to a committed left-wing intellectual before being assassinated by the last Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983) along with his four daughters. This background manifests itself in his most famous work and its interpretation in the miniseries.

The original story (published in *Hora Cero Semanal* between 1957 and 1959) portrays an alien invasion of Buenos Aires, where a group of ordinary people resist in the face of an overwhelming enemy. Although in its first version it was not explicitly political, it was later loaded with symbolism. The comic is set in a Buenos Aires of the second half of the 1950s, hit by a sudden and mysterious snowfall that kills people instantly on contact. A small group of friends gathered for a card game survive barricaded in their host's house and slowly devise ways to get out to get supplies and gather information, which becomes increasingly alarming.

The ingenuity of Oesterheld and Solano López's simple and darkly expressive drawings of strokes and shadows, distinctive at the time, give life to a unique science fiction horror tale. As the survivors venture outside the house where they are trapped and then return, nerves are altered by claustrophobia, amid an overwhelming and terrifying devastation; between the known and the totally strange phenomenon. An underwater breathing mask that the protagonists incorporate into survival suits serves them to venture outside the house on silent and deadly streets.

The protagonists are not superheroes, but normal people, animated by ideas of popular struggle and solidarity, who organize to face a new oppression that plagues the streets of the city.

## **The Netflix adaptation of *The Eternaut***

This year, Netflix announced its photorealistic adaptation of *The Eternaut*. For years, several Argentine and Spanish directors tried to adapt the comic for the screen. Oesterheld himself was involved in an animated TV series that did not thrive.

The new series, whose six episodes (premiered on April 30) met the requirements of the Oesterheld family to be in Spanish and be set in Buenos Aires, rapidly became the most watched non-English series on Netflix.

Unlike the 1950s comic book, *The Eternaut* has been updated to the era of mobile phones, and the list of protagonists has been expanded, but it broadly follows Oesterheld's story.

Toxic snow falls, although now with the auditory accompaniment of a constant wind, a type of phantasmagoria different from the silence of reading. It is vital to keep every inch of the body covered, whether with a

waterproof coat, poncho or pieces of plastic. Giant carnivorous insect-like aliens that invaded the city are everywhere. The six episodes end more or less at the point where the comic book takes a turn and becomes a daring story that touches the conscience. The story takes an anti-war stance and advances an idealistic notion of human solidarity sharply at odds with today's official public opinion.

In the Netflix series there are passages where Juan Salvo, the leading survivor, played very well by the Argentine star Ricardo Darín, has flashbacks from when he was sent as a soldier in 1982 to fight in the Malvinas Islands, a remote British-colonized archipelago in the South Atlantic.

Already in episode three of the series, Elena, played by Carla Peterson, his ex-partner and mother of his daughter, refers to Las Malvinas when she mentions "the islands," in reference to Las Malvinas, not the Falklands, the name imposed by the British. Salvo, a survivor of the bloody combat of Mount Longdon, has moments of anguish when he remembers the trauma of war and the bloody defeat of a badly outgunned force composed mostly of untrained Argentine conscripts.

"The conflict in the Malvinas is not closed, it is still an open wound," Darín told The Associated Press. "It's putting the issue back on the table. It has touched a lot of people."

The references to the Malvinas communicate a deep distrust of the military leadership on the part of the protagonist, who is seen in a flashback emerging from a trench surrounded by the bodies of his comrades.

While the war pitted an imperialist power, the United Kingdom, against an oppressed country and was part of a resurgence of imperialist militarism—from Lebanon to Grenada, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Nicaragua, etc.—the Argentine military dictatorship launched the war as a desperate maneuver in the face of a growing wave of strikes and mass protests and mounting internal crisis. The goal was to divert this movement outward by appealing to nationalism.

However much this conflict demanded from the working class in Argentina and internationally the support of Britain's defeat, it in no way justified ceding any political or military confidence to the Argentine junta or the ruling class. Rather it demanded a deepening of the struggle for the overthrow of the dictatorship and the capitalist regime.

Argentine director and producer Bruno Stagnaro, who created and directed the series and was one of the five screenwriters, has produced a politically relevant work. Gastón Girod, director of photography, gives the snowy urban landscapes full of corpses and abandoned vehicles a particular aesthetic expression. The story evokes contemporary events such as war and dictatorship, and this is what draws the attention of its wide audience.

The story about a small group acting collectively, each of the characters with their own personal peculiarities, humanizes the existential catastrophe and provides a philosophical background that is at odds with the ethos of the capitalist political establishment.

The anti-colonial and anti-dictatorial themes, as well as the call for collective struggle, resonate under conditions in which the ruling class promotes ultra-right forces such as the fascistic governments of Argentina's Javier Milei, who defends the crimes of the 1976-1983 dictatorship that killed Oesterheld, and Donald Trump, who promotes a recolonization of the entire hemisphere under the domination of US imperialism.

Last week, researchers on strike at the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research staged a protest against Milei's budget cuts. Inspired by *The Eternaut*, they donned gas masks and carried signs with the slogans "There is no future without science" and the series' tagline "*Nadie se salva solo*—No one is saved alone."

#### The historical context lived by Héctor Oesterheld

Like the series today, the original comic drew from the historical context in which it was written. In Argentina, from the 1950s onwards there was a series of coups d'état lasting until the 1970s. A coup on September 16, 1955, known as the "Liberating Revolution", overthrew President Juan Domingo Perón. The dictatorship, led by the military, was supported by opposition parties and the Catholic Church along with big business sectors that had distanced themselves from Perón's government. The civic-military dictatorship lasted until 1958. During this period, Peronism was persecuted, trade union movements were repressed, and freedoms were restricted.

Oesterheld opposed the dictatorship. The central objective of the military government was to violently repress the struggles of the labor movement, controlled by Peronism. To this end, in June 1956 it issued Decree No. 4161 providing the legal framework for the repression and shooting of opponents. In this context of violent persecution, the so-called "Peronist resistance" emerged, which came to encompass non-Peronist popular sectors.

At that time in Argentina, political figures claiming to be Trotskyist, such as Nahuel Moreno, instead of seeking to mobilize workers on the basis of an independent political struggle for socialism, adopted a revisionist trajectory, seeking to subordinate workers' struggles and the resistance movement against the dictatorship to Peronism—a bourgeois nationalist tendency.

In 1956, the Morenoite tendency entered the Peronist movement and published a newspaper that declared on its masthead: "Under the discipline of General Perón and the Peronist Superior Command". The newspaper even published Perón's anti-communist diatribes without protest.

Worse, in 1958, it supported the election of the right-wing candidate Arturo Frondizi based on Perón's orders. Even the Peronist left defied this order with about a third of the Peronist electorate casting blank ballots. In this political context, Oesterheld moved steadily to the left, embracing the Montonero guerrilla movement founded in 1970 to oppose the military dictatorship. The Morenistas were to adapt themselves to guerrillaism in the early 1960s.

Having sealed an alliance with General Perón, Frondizi came to power in 1958 continuing right-wing policies undercutting social and democratic rights. To deal with the demonstrations of discontent, the government granted the Army the power to arrest, detain and interrogate trade unionists and opponents.

The 1962 elections precipitated a new military coup. New presidential elections in 1963 with the proscription of Peronism failed to achieve political stability. Faced with workers' struggles and the Peronist opposition, once again the Armed Forces carried out a coup d'état on June 28, 1966. Juan Carlos Onganía assumed de facto command of the country. The "Argentine Revolution" (1966-1973) had the support of the IMF, and subordinated itself to the National Security Doctrine promoted by the Pentagon and the CIA. Onganía implemented a rigid censorship, which reached all the press and all cultural manifestations, including state

intervention against the universities and the expulsion of opposition professors. However, student mobilizations and mass working class uprisings (such as the 1969 *Cordobazo*) weakened the government, provoking an internal coup.

In June 1970, Roberto Levingston, a nationalist general, took office but failed to contain the popular protests. In March 1971, Alejandro Agustín Lanusse was installed, advocating a conciliatory GAN (Great National Agreement) that allowed the return of Perón and organized national elections without proscribing Peronism.

Between 1973 and 1976, Peronism ruled again with four presidents (Cámpora, 1973; Lastiri, 1973; Perón, 1973-1974; and Isabel Perón 1974-1976), but the internal contradictions of Peronism combined with the global economic crisis created political turmoil that was further aggravated by Perón's death in 1974 and the inability of his successor and widow, Isabel Perón, to lead a political stabilization. This crisis set the stage for another military coup and the dictatorship that assassinated the author of *The Eternaut*.

The fierce military dictatorship lasted from 1976 to 1983. Its atrocious toll included tens of thousands of dead and disappeared, hundreds of thousands of exiles and the defeat of the Argentine Army in the Malvinas. Under the rule of the military, Argentina saw a five-fold increase in the foreign debt, the destruction of much of the national productive apparatus and the bankruptcy and hollowing out of public companies because of the corruption of their managers and the implementation of an economic policy that benefited local and foreign capitalists.

In the final analysis, the terrible experience of the Malvinas War was the result of the betrayals of the bourgeois nationalists and their Morenoite supporters, who ended up aligning themselves behind the military junta, leaving the working class with no means to defend its independent political interests. These interests in no way corresponded to the realization of the reactionary nationalist ambitions of the backward Argentine bourgeoisie, but rather required overcoming social and national oppression as part of the international socialist revolution.

The bankruptcy of the dreams of "national development" of the Argentine bourgeoisie finds its maximum expression today, when Milei vows to return Argentina to the path of becoming a world power, supposedly to be achieved by eradicating every social reform implemented over the last century.

#### *The Eternaut II, the story continues*

Oesterheld himself, who began as a writer of adventure comics (like *Ernie Pike* or *Sherlock Time*), underwent a political transformation that affected broad layers of Argentine workers, youth and intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s. As he gravitated toward radical sectors of Peronism such as the Montoneros, he wrote *The War of the Antarctic* (1970), which had an explicitly anti-imperialist message.

In 1973, he founded the publishing house Ediciones de la Urraca, where he published more political versions of his works. He also wrote *The Eternaut II* with an openly anti-capitalist theme.

In later editions of *The Eternaut II* (1976), the story becomes more political. The alien invasion can be read more directly as an allegory for imperialism, dictatorships and class oppression. The sequel (drawn by Alberto Breccia), includes a hidden power ("They") that manipulates from the shadows. Written during Argentina's "dirty war," it was interpreted at the time as a criticism of capitalism, militarism and authoritarianism. The year after the military coup, Oesterheld and his four daughters (along with their husbands) were kidnapped by the dictatorship and killed. Two of the daughters were pregnant when they were abducted and, while it is believed they gave birth in captivity, their children disappeared into the hands of the military. Along with annihilation of his family, Oesterheld's work was censored for its "subversive" content.

According to testimony, the military tried to force him to write an "apolitical" version of *The Eternaut* for the ESMA (Navy Mechanics

School), but Oesterheld refused. He was soon killed.

The “cascarudos” and “hands” (enemies in the comic) represent external forces that dominate through superior technology, similar to colonialism or imperialist intervention in Latin America. The idea of an invisible enemy (like the “They” in *The Eternaut II*) reflects the terror of clandestine repression, which Argentina was already experiencing under the Peronist regime and intensified qualitatively with the 1976 dictatorship.

The protagonists are ordinary people (workers, students, housewives) who organize to resist, symbolizing the power of collective action against exploitation.

The protagonist, Juan Salvo is not a superhero, but an ordinary man who represents the organized people. This contrasts with the US model of individualistic heroes in comics (such as Superman). His eternal journey through time (being “the eternal one”) symbolizes historical memory: the need to remember so as not to repeat mistakes, something that resonates in the fight against post-dictatorship political amnesia being promoted in Argentina and internationally.

Netflix recently announced that there will be a second season of *The Eternaut*. It remains to be seen whether it will incorporate the more openly political themes of Oesterheld’s later work.



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